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RECONSTRUCTING COLLECTIVE IDENTITY FOR PEACEBUILDING: THE INDIGENOUS GUARD IN NORTHERN CAUCA – COLOMBIA

The indigenous Nasa are recognised in Colombia for using innovative strategies to deal with violent conflicts and to claim political rights. One of the most visible and permanent strategies is the Guardia Indígena – GI (Indigenous Guard), a community watch to patrol and protect indigenous people. This study investigates how the Nasa frame the history of the GI, with what purposes and consequences. A language-based perspective was used to analyse how the Nasa frame the GI history and how this framing process affects their actions and practices. Our analysis shows that the Nasa refer mainly to four historical events when talking of GI history. These events function as identification points that contribute particular elements to the guards' collective identity in specific situations. This framing process has become an important power resource for constructing a non-violent collective identity and reconstructing their historical memory for peacebuilding.

Keywords: Historical memory; framing; stories; collective identity; peacebuilding; indigenous Nasa; Colombia

The indigenous Nasa and conflicts in Colombia

At the end of 2016, a peace agreement was signed between the Colombian government and the guerrillas, Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia – People's Army (FARC–EP). This agreement put an official end to the war between these two actors. However, the implementation of the agreement is not self-evident, as the areas most affected by the conflict have been historically marginalised from State support and control (Velasco 2016). Furthermore, when the agreement was put to a plebiscite, it was narrowly rejected, with 50.2 per cent against, and 49.8 per cent in favour. Two years later, doubts remain about who will take control of FARC territories – the government or new criminal bands (Valencia et al. 2017). Pessimism is therefore spreading about the sustainability of the peace.

The northern part of Cauca Province is one of the marginalised territories at high risk of persistent conflicts and violence (FIP 2013). Land and resource struggles among

different sectors have led to the presence of both left- and right-wing armies. The now demobilised FARC and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN, a guerrilla group of around 2,000 people which at time of writing had still not signed up to the peace agreement) were formed in 1970, and paramilitary groups, with different names, have appeared sporadically since 1950. Modern paramilitary groups were organised as self-defence forces against the guerrillas, funded mainly by landowners and drug traffickers in the 1980s. By 2000, these criminal bands were equipped with sophisticated weapons, trained by foreign mercenaries, and grouped in the United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia). Their goals were to take control of regions where they could extract large rents and deny access to the guerrillas or expel them (see for instance, Gray 2008; Hristov 2014; Ugarriza and Craig 2013). Furthermore, Northern Cauca holds a strategic geographical position as part of the Pacific corridor, an entry and exit point for narcotics and weapons smuggling for drug cartels and for provisions for the armies (FSD 2008; CNAI 2007, 2012). Finally, violent conflicts also involve legal and illegal mining exploitation and land disputes between landlords and indigenous people.

As many as 504 indigenous people from Northern Cauca were killed in armed conflicts between 2000 and 2014 (ACIN- Tejido de Defensa de la Vida 2015). One of the most critical junctures of the conflict was from 2001 to 2004, when confrontations between the army and the guerrillas and massacres of indigenous leaders increased considerably (CNAI 2007, 2012; Bolaños Maya 2012). Moreover, since 2016 when the peace agreement was signed, 56 social leaders have been killed in Cauca (Nación 2018). The large indigenous population in the region, mainly from the Nasa community, have the official rights to manage their own territories, and therefore various actors consider them as obstacles to their interests (Toro 1994; CNAI 2012; CHCV 2015). The Nasa, nonetheless, have taken a conscious decision to stay in their territories because their culture, community, and survival are inextricably linked to land; therefore, in their view, displacement implies a dramatic deterioration in community life and physical health (Wirpsa et al. 2009). They have developed various initiatives for survival. The most permanent is the Guardia Indígena (GI: Indigenous Guard), a community watch to patrol and protect indigenous territory and communities, particularly from armed groups.

The Nasa GI is mainly represented by the Association of Indigenous Councils of Northern Cauca (ACIN), which represents around 110,000 people and is part of the Cauca Regional Indigenous Council (CRIC). The Nasa are known at national level as an indigenous group that adopts innovative strategies in a violent environment to claim indigenous rights (Gray 2012). They maintain that the GI represents a non-violent initiative because its members are unarmed. Guards use only symbolic weapons; for example, each guard has a *bastón* (stick), symbolising power bestowed on them by their community. In this study, non-violence is understood as a pragmatic strategy for survival, in which limited violence (stone throwing) is allowed (Eddy 2013), because this definition is a close reflection of our observations in fieldwork about GI practices.

Researchers exploring indigenous groups' role in conflicts in Cauca have focused on political struggles (see for instance Findji 1991; van de Sandt 2003; Hristov 2005; Findji and Rojas 1985). Some conclude that the non-violent Nasa initiatives

are an innovative and integral approach to peacebuilding, based on indigenous cultural practices and traditions (see for instance Hernández Delgado 2006; Wilches-Chaux 2005; Wirpsa et al. 2009), and that the GI is a logical response to the violent context (Sandoval Forero 2008). Rappaport (1990) conducted extensive research among indigenous groups in Cauca revealing that the Nasa use historical memory to achieve political rights and recognition. She analyses the influence of oral stories in the political practices of the Nasa and shows how the reinterpretation of the past is a mechanism that they use to address political struggles. However, the overemphasis on indigenous political struggles with the State eclipses the question of indigenous people's everyday struggles for survival. Following Rappaport on how Nasa historical memory might help them to survive the present, this study aims to ascertain how the Nasa frame the GI history and the role played by these framing processes in how indigenous guards manage violent conflicts every day. Our interest derives from our fieldwork, as we could observe that these topics are a clear and important part of Nasa survival strategies. Furthermore, in a post-conflict context in Colombia, initiatives like the GI could bring valuable insights about challenges and opportunities for a sustainable peace.

This study adopts a qualitative interpretative approach in which individuals are seen as members of a community of meaning, where traditions, practices, language, and other cultural elements provide them with the materials to produce their meaning-making of everyday events (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006). Researchers using the interpretative approach interact with their informants in their own conditions and circumstances (Haverland and Yanow 2012). Therefore, during fieldwork we employed ethnographic methods. In this study, how the Nasa frame their GI history, and how this framing process affects their actions and practices, were analysed from a language-based perspective. Framing refers to the discursive strategies that people deploy to achieve certain goals (Entman 1993; Benford and Snow 2000). Depending on what is being framed, Gray (2004) distinguishes issue frames (what the situation is about), identity frames (who we are and what we do), and characterisation frames (who they are and what they do). We therefore analyse three types of framing processes: framing the issue, framing identities, and framing others. We argue that the Nasa strategically frame GI history through four identification stories and, by doing so, construct their historical memory and reconstruct their collective identity, moving towards a non-violent collective identity which, indeed, aims to contribute to sustainable peace in Colombia.

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected by the first author living in Santander de Quilichao, Cauca, and working in ACIN headquarters for over 220 days in a 12-month period from March 2014 to March 2015. The researcher collaborated in the activities of the organisation, supported communication tasks, and joined informal events. The idea was to live, as much as possible, as an ACIN member.

The primary methods used for data collection were participant observation, semi-structured interviews, informal conversations, and document analysis. Field notes were collected on date, place, activities, perceptions, and fragments of

conversations. In total, the first author visited 13 ACIN communities, engaged in participant observation in 31 ACIN meetings about immediate political and violent events relating to the organisation, and joined 14 GI actions to manage conflicts. In addition, a convenience sample of 31 indigenous guards and leaders from different communities and of different ages were interviewed (video-recorded) during their daily activities. From this group, six key informants were selected, who constantly provided background information in specific situations and contexts. These interactions were recorded on video or audio, except for those that took place spontaneously, which were described in field notes. Also, 33 official documents were collected, including previous assemblies' minutes and brochures about the organisation and its structure. Interviews were audio-taped, transcribed verbatim, and then translated from Spanish to English. Framing analysis was conducted for interviews and official documents. Events and frames relating to GI history were coded and selected. Field notes were used for reflection, reviewing our interpretations, and elaborating thick descriptions (Geertz 1973) that show details of the framing context.

Brief description of the Guardia Indígena

By 2015, in Northern Cauca, the GI consisted of 1,820 people between 13 and 68 years old, of whom 460 were women and 1,360 were men, from 21 communities represented by ACIN. The GI works as a decentralised entity, in which each *cabildo* (council) decides upon its own guards' daily activities. Community members become guards on a voluntary basis. Their role is to consolidate some forms of self-justice and preserve people's safety and autonomy in their territory. Indigenous guards' activities include: patrolling to inspect for illegal mining and the presence of armed groups; protecting leaders and the community in general from outsiders; acting against crimes like robbery, street fights, and kidnapping; and conducting inspections to check for dangerous artefacts like landmines that could injure people. Guard members also participate actively in organising meetings, rituals, and capacity-building workshops.

Identification stories

We found that in North Cauca, when talking about the creation of the GI, the Nasa refer mainly to four historical junctures: (1) their struggles with the Spanish in the sixteenth century, (2) the creation of indigenous organisations in the 1960s and 1970s, (3) the Armed Movement Quintín Lame (MAQL) guerrilla in the 1980s, and (4) paramilitary incursions in 2000–2003.

How these stories were chosen and became the keystones of GI identity was beyond the scope of this study. Guards participate in community assemblies, capacity-building activities, political training, and workshops in general, and they perhaps learn some of these stories there. In fieldwork, however, it was possible to observe that oral tradition is a cornerstone in how the Nasa organise the GI.

Young guards are constantly curious and ask the elders about their past stories, and, in conversations, people mention *caciques* (leaders; female *cacicas*) as if they know them and add characteristics and adjectives to describe them. Hence, historical characters are very much present in their conversations.

In the following section, we present a historical introduction to each identification point, followed by an analysis of the framing processes in each story, that is, which events they select when talking, how they present their actions and themselves, and with what purpose.

First identification point: the warrior

In pre-colonial times, indigenous communities in Northern Cauca were not pacific people who lived in harmony with their environment. Indeed, these communities were recognised as warriors (Bonilla Sandoval 1982; Rappaport 1990; Wilches-Chaux 2005), and there are chronicles of clashes among indigenous neighbours in this region that continued even after the arrival of the Spanish (Gómez and Ariel Ruiz 1997). According to the literature (Rappaport 1990), the Nasa became a political unit in the eighteenth century, when caciques Juan Tama and Manuel de Quilo y Sicos negotiated their status as legal tributaries of the Spanish crown, in exchange for indigenous people keeping their territories, called *resguardos*.

Resguardos and *cabildos* were created by the Spanish conquerors in 1592 to organise and allocate indigenous populations in particular territories. Indigenous people took advantage of the legal structure established by the crown, as communities who possessed these land titles had the possibility of setting up their own community government and keeping some of their traditional customs and social control systems (Wirpsa et al. 2009). With time, indigenous people appropriated these concepts and kept them as part of their strategies for land struggle. Today, the *resguardos* represent indigenous territories, which have been distinct legal entities under Colombian law since 1991, recognised as communal, unavailable for sale or rent, and governed by indigenous authorities.

Although the Nasa became a formal political unit in the eighteenth century, in fieldwork we found that people had identified themselves as a group much earlier. Before the Spanish arrival, indigenous people were dispersed in the Cauca region and did not belong to a single tribe. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, however, they had to group themselves to combat a new common enemy, the Spanish, with whom they fought many fierce battles. It took the Spanish almost a century to conquer these people (Bonilla Sandoval 1982; Rappaport 1990; Wilches-Chaux 2005). The first identification point of the GI, the warrior, relates to a historical character from the sixteenth century, Cacica Gaitana.

Gaitana was first described by the Spanish chronicler Juan de Castellanos (1850) as a leader respected and followed by many people, around 1537. The story says that the Spanish conqueror Pedro de Añasco arrived at Timaná, sent for the cacica's son to pay tribute, but burned him alive in front of the cacica because he did not want to pay. Claiming justice, Gaitana raised an army of many thousand

indigenous people and defeated the Spanish. The chronicle says that the cacica tortured Pedro de Añasco before killing him.

The historian Victor Bonilla Sandoval (1982) identifies the battle of Peñon de Tálaga in 1538, in which the cacica defeated the Spanish, as the beginning of Nasa organisation (Bonilla Sandoval 1982; Yule 2012). On the CRIC website, the cacica is mentioned as one of the first indigenous leaders (CRIC 2013). Rappaport (1990) includes a re-telling of the story by Julio Niquinás in 1971, a leader from Tierradentro who described a vivid story of the cacica and her son. All these sources agree that the cacica was an indigenous leader whose son was killed by Pedro de Añasco, provoking a war with the Spanish that the cacica and her army won.

Framing their identity as millenarian warriors

The Nasa agree that the GI has its roots in colonial times. For them, there is no doubt that the Guard is *millenarian*, and they express this openly during public events. An informant explained her experience: 'I started in the Guard in 2001, but the Guard is millenarian because it is the same resistance of indigenous people to survive, from the Spanish invasions until now.'[1]

Our respondent is emphasising the continuity of their actions by stressing 'same resistance'. Continuity is an essential function of framing their identity as warriors because it connects their actions as guards with their indigenous roots.

This historical reference contributes many elements to the GI identity. The GI National Coordinator described the GI's origin as follows: 'The Indigenous Guard is a process of resistance that started with Cacica Gaitana in 1500. One could almost say that the first Guard was the Cacica, who defended our territory from the Spanish invaders …'.[2] There are at least three frames in this quotation. First, by choosing Gaitana as the first guard, he wants to present the guards as fierce warriors able to win any battle. Two, by talking about a *process of resistance*, this guard is framing the issue to reinforce the function of continuity. Moreover, in daily conversations the Nasa consistently frame their actions as a *process*. When, for instance, new people arrive at ACIN, members often say: 'Welcome to our process'. By framing the issue as *a process*, they emphasise continuity and change, suggesting that they recognise their actions as part of a continuous transformation instead of, for instance, as part of a traditional past that they are trying or want to preserve. Thus, in the process frame they include the past and the present. Third, by framing the situation as *Spanish invasion* instead of, for instance, war, the boundaries with their enemies are constructed in such a way that the Nasa are local people forced to defend themselves and the Spanish are outsiders. Thus, the GI identity is also based on the exclusion of external adversaries, in this case: *Spanish invaders*.

Cacica Gaitana, however, is also renowned for another story. It is said that, when she captured Pedro Añasco, she ordered his eyes to be removed and dragged him behind her horse, exhibiting him in many towns until he died (González Cruz 1978). Therefore, the cacica is also associated with violent actions, but our data show that the Nasa do not want to present themselves as violent. The millenarian warrior, therefore, represents an apparently contradictory violent identity that

needs to be justified. Various discursive strategies are deployed to deal with this apparent contradiction, as shown in the next utterance. 'If we look at history, at some junctures, when there was systematic aggression against us, we had to use guns. If we look at history, that is what Cacica Gaitana did …',[3] claims the Coordinator of ACIN's *Tejido de Defensa de la Vida*, the branch of ACIN that coordinates activities with the guards. This respondent defines the situation as *systematic aggression*. Consequently, indigenous people *had to use guns*. Thus, the violence wrought by their ancestors is framed as self-defence, which makes it acceptable. As Entman explained, when talking, people define situations, diagnose causes, make moral judgements, and suggest remedies (Entman 1993). In the next quote, similar and even stronger justifications are made:

> Cacica Gaitana struggled strongly against the Spanish invasion, resisted all the attacks …. Her fights left us a legacy, an important motto: defend our lives and our territory …. Cacica Gaitana taught us to defend life, as warriors, not because we Nasa women are warriors, we are not. You cannot defend life by destroying it, turning yourself into a murderer. But there are times when the invading forces are so destructive, their arrogance and ambition so blind, that the only way to stop the destruction is to resist with strength the blindness, hatred, and ambition of some; because domination can be so strong that non-warrior people are forced to become warriors, even against their own nature …. The dignity of the Nasa and other indigenous people cannot be sold or negotiated. We, as people and community, are peaceful … but the moment that we have no choice and our life and our territory are going to be taken away, then we also fight and resist.[4]

This respondent discursively justifies her ancestors' actions by adding negative moral judgements about the outsiders. In contrast, the Nasa are depicted as having positive moral principles. However, she also emphasises that the Nasa will fight and resist when necessary. This fragment highlights another function of framing their identity as warriors: it allows guards to present themselves as strong and to fight and resist when presented with unscrupulous opponents.

In these examples, we can observe that the framing process is very important for identity construction, as collective identities involve the articulation of differences in relation to others (Escobar 2008). Moreover, these identities have cues for an interior and an exterior common recognition (Von Busekist 2004), which can be based on visible features, practices, and actions. For instance, the difference between the indigenous people and the Spanish is visible because, according to the Nasa, the Spanish were intrinsically violent and therefore the indigenous people had to use violence for self-defence.

The idea of Nasa as millenarian warriors also circulates in meetings and public demonstrations through posters, magazines, and banners, where drawings of strong indigenous people appear, reinforced by sentences about strength and resistance. In informal conversations, a guard from Cerro Tijeras explained: 'You know? We are warriors. We do not like to be dominated …. We are fighters; this is the reason why we still exist'. He is framing an identity of invincibility and freedom here. Similarly, in the next quote, the National Coordinator of the Guard affirms:

> Here in Cauca I think [the Guard] has been a way out for the warrior spirit that the Nasa and other indigenous groups have …. We are savages in the epistemological meaning of the word.

> Because the word savage has been mistreated, misunderstood, so we are taking this word back. We are savages. Savage people are from the forest, the ones who have not been deformed, who are still fierce to run freely across the savannah and the valleys, and who do not allow others to hunt them.[5]

This quotation has several features of an identity. This is a different warrior than the previous one, he is not brave or violent, he is a savage warrior who has been controlled. He is an ideal type, free, independent, connected with nature. Moreover, the informant acknowledges the power of words and their meaning, explaining that savage has been misunderstood, deploying a discursive strategy that eliminates the pejorative meaning. As he is a leader, this description could be used to motivate guards or to encourage people to join or support the GI.

On many occasions during fieldwork, deployment of characteristics of the warrior identity for managing violent conflicts could be observed, when the guards sat together and recounted anecdotes of different dangerous situations, heated discussions with FARC members, confrontations with the police, or rescues of kidnapped people. They frame their actions in utterances such as: 'We do not run, we have to defend our territory'; 'If we do not defend our territory, no one else is going to do it'; 'We have to be strong to survive …'; 'I do not care if I die, because the others [Nasa] will continue our struggle …' 'If you work with us, you have to be fearless'. In these interactions, guards are framing their identity as 'not dominated', 'fighters', 'autonomous', 'brave', 'independent', 'strong', and 'invincible'. Moreover, a contrast is implicitly constructed in relation to other indigenous peoples that were dominated and no longer exist. The Nasa have survived because they are brave, strong, and they do not fear to die. We suspect that these characteristics of Nasa identity are very old, at the core of their identity. The chronicler Juan de Castellanos (1850) described indigenous people from this region as fierce warriors. Young guards might learn from early childhood that being brave is important, in their homes and community assemblies and through rituals and training.

A key informant told us the following story. In 2011, in Cerro Tijeras *resguardo*, in a confrontation between the army and FARC, an old lady was caught inside a house in the crossfire. Our informant was young and new in the GI, but he was assigned as GI coordinator in his community and therefore had to manage the situation. At some point, a male guard leader from ACIN and a group of other guards arrived at the village and gave him instructions to rescue the woman. The ACIN leader ran towards the woman's house, and our informant followed him:

> When we saw ACIN representatives we were happy. We did not feel alone … when I saw [the leader], I told him there was this old woman. He didn't delay and started to run in the direction of the house. I could hear the bullets crossing, but I felt strong with him …. We protected the woman with our own bodies and rescued her. I felt like a hero! He [the leader] is one of the big guards.[6]

In this fragment, the respondent correlates his personal feelings and experience with the GI identity. Equally, by making a positive moral judgement about the capacity of the other guard to deal with emotions in dangerous situations and act

to protect other people, he is seeking a construction of the GI identity as a fierce and brave hero. This image could also be ascribed to a warrior identity.

In this section, we have shown that Cacica Gaitana represents the first point of identification of the Nasa and, more specifically, the GI identity, namely, *the warrior*. To sum up, this identity has three main functions: (1) it works as a key point of identification linking current actions to the past, supporting the guards in the reconstruction of a continuous and strong identity; (2) it makes the guards and their strategies different from non-indigenous groups, but it also allows a difference to be drawn between them and other indigenous communities that were dominated; (3) it encompasses features such as bravery, strength, being good fighters, and not being dominated, which are necessary abilities for the guards to deal with the dangerous and uncertain situations that they face in their everyday practices as guards.

The warrior identity, however, also represents a challenge to their identity construction because it is associated with violence. Therefore, the guards continuously deploy different discursive strategies to justify the actions of their ancestors, making moral judgements. In conclusion, by framing these various elements, the respondents assemble a narrative of a peaceful community that was occasionally forced to fight. The framing process helps them to promote a particular interpretation of their ancestors' actions and to reconstruct their identities and act accordingly in specific situations in the present.

Second identification point: defenders of the land

In the nineteenth century when Colombia gained independence from Spain, indigenous people struggled to be included in the politics and land rights system (Sanders 2004). A new tax regime allowed hacienda owners to exploit indigenous people through a labour institution called *terraje* (Velasco 2011), which consisted of a labour-rent paid to landowners by tenants (Hristov 2005). In 1890, Law 89 provided indigenous people with land stewardship. Manuel Quintín Lame, an important indigenous leader from Tierradentro (1883–1967), studied the law and found a legal basis for recovering indigenous *resguardos*. Lame was born in El Borbollón, part of the Polindara hacienda, where his parents were *terrajeros* (sharecroppers). Having a Nasa father and a mother from the Misak ethnic group, he fought for the economic and social autonomy of indigenous people, starting with the abolition of *terraje*.

His movement, called the Quintinada, was very active between 1914 and 1918. It had the following objectives:

- Defence of indigenous territory and rejection of any law that adversely affected the *resguardos*.
- Total refusal to pay *terraje* or to comply with personal obligations for land rights.
- Declaration of the *cabildos* as legitimate authority.
- Land recovery from usurping landlords and refusal to recognise land titles that are not based on royal certificates.
- Rejection and condemnation of the racial discrimination to which Colombian indigenous people are subjected.

These goals constitute a bond of continuity between the manifestos of Juan Tama and Manuel de Quilo y Sicos and the current indigenous movement. In this way, Manuel Quintín Lame laid the roots for the indigenous movement, its actions, and its struggle platform, in a process that led to the creation of CRIC in 1971 (See for instance: Vasco Uribe 2008; Romero-Loaiza 2006; Gómez Cardona 2012; Rappaport 2005b, 1990; Bonilla et al. 1972).

Framing their identity as guardians of indigenous land

The literature suggests that the GI appeared during indigenous land recuperation processes at the end of the 1960s, when it was called the Civic Guard (Caviedes and Caldón 2007). The Civic Guard appeared in 1969 when indigenous people and farmers mobilised with the aim of recovering their lands (CECOIN 2007; CMH 2012). Guards organised sporadically for activities like patrolling the territory, warning about the presence of enemies, and taking the lead in confrontations with the police. They also helped with the logistics in assemblies and *mingas*, a traditional form of communal work based on groups that exchange labour-power.
The leading organisations in these processes were the National Association of Farmer Users (ANUC) and CRIC, representing indigenous claims. In both formal interviews and informal conversations, indigenous people recognised the importance of the Civic Guard in the history of the GI. The National Indigenous Guard Coordinator explained:

> In 1969, the Guard was born, but it was born as Civic Guard. Why? Because in 1969 or 1970 the political land struggle was undertaken not just by indigenous people, but by farmers also .... It was for controlling the land recovery process and watching .... They [indigenous guards] had to be aware of security .... The Indigenous Guard was created for land recovery and events also, because, when CRIC was created, assemblies, meetings, strong mobilisation processes started, and we needed a group of people to take care of the discipline in these events and control the mobilisations.[7]

In this quote, our informant aims to draw the boundaries of guards' specific tasks at a specific juncture. The Civic Guard's role is framed as for control, security, and discipline within the indigenous organisations. All of these tasks are still part of the GI's activities. Also, the identity is framed in relation to other indigenous people, who might need help or to be controlled by the guards in specific situations, like public events and mobilisations.

The respondent also implies a subtle boundary with farmers, suggesting that not all outsiders are enemies. To that end, he defines the situation as a political land struggle, which was developed together with farmers. This indicates that, when it comes to the struggle for land, indigenous people and farmers are part of the same alliance. Moreover, on some occasions, the Nasa also frame themselves as farmers. In daily conversations for instance, the Nasa remark on their farmer identity by talking about their bodily strength. 'I am getting weak by working in the office, I need to go back to the farm', affirmed a leader from Canoas on arriving at a meeting in ACIN. 'A respected guard does not just stand firmly with the bastón, he also has to sow',

explained another leader in a meeting. This equivalence with farmers is important because, when talking about contemporary issues, they frame themselves in opposition to outsiders or external groups, but not by means of ethnic affiliations or origins per se. Therefore, the Civic Guard story, in terms of identity construction, creates a subtle distinction and a partnership with farmers.

Third identification point: the armed movement

After CRIC was created, many indigenous leaders were killed and persecuted, and different indigenous self-defence groups were organised sporadically, leading to formalisation of the MAQL, in 1984, the only guerrilla group in Colombia that is recognised as indigenous (Tattay and Peña 2013; CMH 2012; Peñaranda 2015). The MAQL was organised with support and training from other guerrillas such as the M-19. However, the group's main goal was self-defence of indigenous organisations from State repression and the eradication of *terraje*. Thus, their actions were only regional and in self-defence (Tattay and Peña 2013), whereas guerrillas like the ELN, FARC, and M-19 were strengthening their strategies in many regions, including Cauca, with the goal of becoming national movements.

During the 1980s, the war intensified in Cauca, and confrontations between guerrillas were frequent, even by mistake (Tattay and Peña 2013; CNMH 2015). FARC presented the main threat to indigenous leaders who did not follow their instructions, and many young Nasa were recruited into the ranks of different guerrilla groups (CMH 2012; Pécaut 2003; Peñaranda 2015). Furthermore, 15 Nasa traditional shamans were accused of witchcraft and killed by FARC members (CNMH 2015, 224). Thus, there was a very tense and distrustful relationship between indigenous communities and the guerrillas.

In 1990, the MAQL and other guerrillas signed a peace agreement with the Colombian government. A new constitution was created in 1991, and indigenous territories were recognised. In 1994, CRIC became a decentralised organisation, an umbrella for many local organisations, and leaders from Northern Cauca funded ACIN.

Framing identity as different from other guerrillas

In an interview in 1996, a leader from Toribío and former member of the MAQL explained:

> We didn't want to take power, we wanted to support the organisational process in communities. So, communities really could have access to land, basic needs, and also their cultural, political, and social rights would be respected. Naturally, not just indigenous communities but farmer communities that were struggling for autonomy. This is important because some groups like FARC wanted to control indigenous leaders and communities. Our movement gave an opportunity for communities to continue their position of autonomy, autonomy from the government, the landlords, and the leftist organisations. (Tattay and Peña 2013, 42)

In this quote, the respondent frames the MAQL by drawing boundaries between themselves and other guerrillas, especially FARC. He explains the main differences

by contrasting each group's goal: one group wanted power and control, whereas the MAQL offered autonomy to indigenous and farmer communities. This interview occurred a few years after the MAQL signed the 1990 peace agreement with the government, and since then indigenous organisations have emphasised their separation from any guerrilla group.

In this quote, communities are an essential part of the MAQL identity. This is an important aspect for indigenous people, as very often and in different settings the Nasa frame the power of indigenous organisations in relation to the support that they get from their communities: 'Here the people rule and the government obeys' is a frequently expressed view on posters in organisations and graffiti in communities.

Equally, framing the issue as autonomy represents a key part of Nasa identity, mentioned very often in ACIN documents and meetings. The Nasa define autonomy as: 'people's rights to control, watch, and organise their social and political life inside the *resguardos*, with guidance from *cabildos* [indigenous authorities] and rejecting impositions from externals or outsiders' (CMH 2012, 194). The boundary work of this definition is evident; when our respondent refers to *autonomy from*, he reinforces the idea of rejecting outsiders' authority. The constant framing of externals or outsiders together with moral judgements, such as for instance *imposition*, supports the story function in which these outsiders become external adversaries. Framing the issue as a land struggle, which also appeared in the Civic Guard story, is an important strategy that justifies the Nasa communities' actions because it relates to their own motivations and wishes to keep their ancestral territory.

A former member of the MAQL, currently a guard Coordinator, explained the transition from the MAQL to the Civic Guard and the GI, as follows:

> When a group takes guns and it is not clear why, they forget, they take different ways faraway from the policies; the essence of the struggle gets lost in that moment. If you want to have a strong-armed group, it's not just a concept of defending the territory. Members start kidnapping, extorting, and getting power through guns; so, the essence is neither defending the territory any more nor supporting the process of recovering land. So, we saw that the movement [the MAQL] was becoming bigger, it was going to [Provinces] Chocó, Tolima, so the leaders met and said: no, if we continue like this, then, there is not going to be territory, not *cabildos*, and not leaders. Our option is to work through peaceful means, working in the [indigenous] organisations and getting the territory through a peaceful process and the political formation of people .... At that time, the Civic Guard was there, and many of us became part of it.[8]

Our key informant here emphasises differences from other guerrillas by making moral judgements about their strategies and goals. In contrast, the Civic Guard is framed as an option to 'work through peaceful means'. As in previous quotations, our respondent tries to legitimise violent actions in the past, but at the same time considers violence as a wrong strategy.

Interestingly, the MAQL, which was mentioned by ACIN guards, is not referred to in official documents as part of GI history. However, our data show that this historical reference is articulated by indigenous guards in informal conversations, especially because some former MAQL members have strategic positions as

coordinators; and we observed that they explain to young guards that, after the MAQL, the indigenous organisations shifted to a strategy of non-violence. Thus, the MAQL story entails a close experience with violence, and the strategy of non-violence can be framed as a lesson learned from past experiences, thereby making this story a powerful discursive strategy to attract new members.

Throughout this section, we have shown that the Civic Guard and the MAQL represent the second and third points of identification, which have various functions: (1) they distinguish between the guards and other indigenous people who might need control and discipline; (2) they create a partnership with farmers; (3) they help to draw boundaries between the Nasa and FARC members (this seems to represent an expulsion of the FARC from their identity, which most likely implies an expulsion of violence); (4) finally, these stories separate the Nasa from external groups that want to control them. All this boundary work is also constructed by framing the issue as a land struggle.

These stories are closely related to CRIC's and ACIN's principles, which relate mainly to land struggle and cultural resistance. Also, we have shown that guards aimed to reconstruct their identity as different from the guerrillas. This is a critical strategy for protection, distancing themselves from the conflict between the official government and leftist guerrillas. Finally, the MAQL story introduces the non-violent strategy as a key element of GI identity.

Fourth identification point

When talking about the specific point at which the GI was formalised as it is nowadays, the Nasa refer to a period between 2001 and 2003 when paramilitary armies entered Cauca Province. The paramilitary goal was to take control of some territories managed by the guerrillas FARC and ELN. Civil communities living in the region, including indigenous people, were caught in the crossfire. By 2004, 21 municipalities had been attacked, 52 indigenous leaders had been killed, and around 153 indigenous people had disappeared (CNAI 2007). In 2001, the Nasa formalised the GI to prevent displacement of their communities and to protect people against armed groups.

Framing identity as non-violent human rights defenders

In interviews, guards explained that from April to May 2001 they received training from indigenous leaders on topics like indigenous rights and indigenous political history. In addition to that and supported by international collaborators, the guards were also trained on human rights and how to handle dangerous situations.

Under resolution 003 of 28 May 2001, the GI was formalised and its principles, main goals, and activities were explained in an official document:

> The Indigenous Guard has the fundamental objective of preserving the integrity and autonomy of the territory, defending human rights in general and our rights as indigenous communities in

> particular, while respecting and spreading our culture. The Indigenous Guard is supported by communities and their authorities; training, formation, and discipline are based on the Origin Law and the rights recognised in the National Constitution. It is not an entity of military character. (ACIN 2004, 33)

In this document, the GI's goals are first framed in relation to autonomy and territory, which are also used to justify the MAQL actions. However, new framing processes appear relating to the legal system, the constitution, and human and indigenous rights, and this differs from the warrior, the Civic guards, and the MAQL stories. Whereas the Cacica Gaitana and the MAQL stories related mainly to military strategies, the current GI represents a non-violent human rights defender identity, explicitly framed as non-military, perhaps to reinforce distance from other groups – paramilitaries and guerrillas – that use violence.

In interviews and documents, the formalisation of the non-violent GI gives the impression of a strategic and conscious decision by indigenous organisations to manage the violence around them. A key informant, the Coordinator of the *Tejido Defensa de la Vida*, explained:

> We had reviewed our history and concluded that it was a mistake when we took up guns, and indigenous authorities and communities decided we do not want more guns because guns are synonymous with death and we are defenders of life.[9]

The GI identity is framed by establishing a moral principle: 'we are defenders of life'. This framing process functions for drawing boundaries between the Nasa and other groups that use guns, reinforcing the idea of using non-violence to confront external adversaries, but it also functions as boundary work with their own past and their own previous violent strategies. Moreover, as we have seen in many quotations, there is an inherent idea that violence brings more violence, as guns equal death.

On 17 January 2007 in Toribío, indigenous authorities in a general assembly decided to change the name of the GI to *Kiwe Thegnas*, which in the Nasa language – Nasa Yuwe – means 'earth beings'. A key informant, the coordinator of the *Teijdo Defensa de la Vida*, explained the meaning of the name:

> Kiwe Thegnas has a deep cosmological meaning rooted in indigenous values and history. Kiwe Thegnas is the one that takes care of the land, takes care of people, especially children. Kiwe Thegnas takes care of indigenous history and organisations, of our cultural values framed in rituals and spirituality. We feel Kiwe Thegnas starts there, understanding the land, the problems in the territory; because the territory is part of us, it is the beginning of life, and it cannot be without Indians. This is what the elders have interpreted and told us.[10]

The framing used in this quote suggests that the warrior identity story and the military strategies are less important, and that cultural values, rituals, and spirituality are becoming more relevant. Thus, the Kiwe Thegnas reaches a different level, a spiritual leader and protector of indigenous traditions and territories. The frame brings together the political and the spiritual world, which, according to our research, is a relatively new strategy for the Nasa. This revitalisation of indigenous cosmology most probably is the result of long processes relating to their previous

experiences with the MAQL but also to formal processes that preceded the formalisation of the guard: CRIC's foundation and the creation of CRIC's Bilingual and Intercultural Education Programme in the 1970s (PEBI/Cric 2004), the Planes de Vida (community life plans) in the 1980s, ACIN's creation in 1994, among many others.

Changing the GI's name and using members' own traditional language is a clear example of reframing and re-signifying the GI identity. At the same time, the Kiwe Thegnas story links to indigenous worldviews and therefore gives continuity to the Nasa identity. Likewise, the Kiwe Thegnas connects the GI with the international discourse on *noble savages* (Ulloa 2001), which links up with international ecological and social movements.

By framing new identity stories as peaceful and defending human rights, the Nasa adapt the GI identity to new circumstances and link it to wider, contemporary, and internationally recognised identities. This section shows that the Kiwe Thegnas identification point serves different functions: (1) it positions the GI as a non-violent strategy; (2) it encourages indigenous guards to use non-violent methods; and (3) it links their actions to non-violent and ecological social movements and human rights organisations around the world.

Framing their identity as non-violent is a relatively new and perhaps conscious Nasa strategy. However, this non-violent feature did not replace that of the warrior story. Instead, the Nasa have managed to adapt the 'less conscious' warrior story to a new context where some of its features have been dropped and others have been preserved. Consequently, the Nasa have constructed a narrative of a complex and resilient identity to face difficult challenges in their environment (See Table 1). The current GI identity refers to a non-violent, human rights defender, a spiritual person, and a millenarian warrior.

The GI as a collective identity links past events to current decisions and relates these decisions to specific principles: indigenous organisations, indigenous culture, communities, resistance, and autonomy. However, all of these principles are framed in relation to one constant issue: *indigenous territories*. Framing the issue as indigenous territory also helps to construct continuity in their identities. For them, the externals who want to take indigenous territories can change in different periods, but the Nasa have been here in this territory since before the Spanish arrival. Interestingly, when they talk about Cacica Gaitana, the issue is about *defending the territory*; when they speak of the Civic Guard and the MAQL, the issue is *land struggles or land recovery*; and when they talk about the GI, the issue is again about *defending the territory* or even *controlling the territory*. The difference relates mainly to the legal status of the situation. The issue of the indigenous territories is transversal to all the stories identified in this study and is directly related to Nasa identities.

Different narratives and different strategies

Official CRIC and ACIN documents frame the GI history with vague sentences and without specific historical events. The CRIC website describes the guard history as follows (CRIC 2016):

The functions of the guards come from the past at different stages:

- *Since the colonisation time: when we were invaded, and we had to defend ourselves from the invader.*
- *The time of Juan Tama: Rebuilding the resguardos, when surveillance and resistance are given.*
- *The time of CRIC creation in 1971: with the process of recovering the land, when the guards were in charge of giving alarm against the landowner.*

Table 1. Identification points for collective identity reconstruction.

Identification point	Historical justification	Functions for collective identity construction
Cacica Gaitana Struggles	It refers to the same goals as the GI	• Continuity: it links current actions to past actions and helps in the reconstruction of a continuous and strong identity • Distinguishes them from other indigenous groups and external groups • Brings features like bravery, strength, being good fighters, un-dominated, thus helping guards to deal with dangerous and uncertain situations
Civic Guards	The first practices of the current GI appeared here	• Distinguishes guards from other indigenous people who might need control and discipline • Creates a partnership with farmers • Distinguishes Nasa from external groups that want to control them • Land as the main issue, helps them in the claim for autonomy
MAQL	It refers to the same goals as the GI and some practices also appeared	• Distinguishes guards from FARC members • Rejects violence as a strategy
Paramilitary incursions	The current GI was formalised	• Positions the Guard as non-violent • Links their actions to non-violent social movements and human rights organisations
Kiwe Thegnas	The GI is resignified with cultural aspects	• Continuity: it links their worldview with current actions • Features relating to taking care of land and nature link them with noble savage identity and link their actions to international ecological social movements

If we compare the stories, the Cacica Gaitana character is replaced by Cacique Juan Tama and the MAQL has been deleted. The Juan Tama story could convey a political strategy related to diplomacy and dialogue. As mentioned, Tama negotiated the possibility of creating the indigenous territories under the Spanish crown. Thus, each historical character brings a set of features to the collective identity. In previous studies also, indigenous leaders use both characters, indicating that one

identity story does not exclude the other. Choosing which character to present in CRIC's official website is a political decision, and it could be related to this idea of excluding violence from guards' actions.

Discussion

Our data show framing processes of historical memory. In these framing processes, we can unveil a collective identity construction. Collective identities are grounded in the action of retelling the past (Bucholtz and Kira 2005). Thus, in this case, historical memory becomes a tool for collective identity reconstruction, and this is translated into specific practices and actions.

We show that these stories work as historical identification points that contribute particular elements to the current guard collective identity in specific contexts. According to Hall (1990), collective identities hinge on points of identification made within discourses, history, and practices. Collective identities are a relational and socio-cultural phenomenon that are visible and circulate in local contexts of interaction (for a language perspective on identity see Bucholtz and Kira 2005). Moreover, these identities maintain a close relation to political systems in which they are immersed and their values, whether by approbation or rejection (Von Busekist 2004). In our results, we see that the framing for GI identity construction is about drawing clear boundaries between it and other groups that use violence and creating images about the ideal behaviour of group members: use non-violent tactics, but be brave.

Organisational studies have shown the power of daily conversations in constructing group identities, developing trust, and creating change (de Vries et al. 2015; Kim and Kim 2008; Aarts et al. 2011). Previous studies show that an indigenous presence can serve as a barrier that controls the free exercise of dominion by armed groups, including the Colombian military (Rappaport 2002; Hristov 2009). Rappaport (2005a) suggests that, as armed conflicts are threatening indigenous survival in Cauca, indigenous people can survive if they participate in processes of group identity formation that promote the construction of innovative strategies, like the GI. In our study, we show how a complex and multi-layered collective identity is constructed by means of stories from the past. In addition, we found characteristics that strengthen these collective identities and make them useful for dealing with violent conflicts in a non-violent way.

Among Nasa communities, the struggles of Cacica Gaitana, the Civic Guard, and the MAQL are communicated as stories that are being collectively constructed to create logics and justifications for yesterday's, today's, and tomorrow's practices and decisions. This is not necessarily a conscious process, but the ongoing collective framing helps them to create a shared vision of their situation, to produce and recognise a collective GI identity, and to guide members in taking specific positions and actions when faced with new situations (Hardy et al. 2005). The Nasa mobilise the warrior story in different contexts and times. It would seem easier just to delete the warrior from the story, as was done in the CRIC website. However, in Northern Cauca, the violent context demands a warrior identity. We

clarify, however, that in the current situation indigenous people do not claim to be proud of being violent; instead, as they are tired of violence, they express pride in being brave when faced with violent situations.

Clearly, as explained by Rappaport (1990), the Nasa do not simply reflect on past events; instead, they constantly inquire into the relationship between past events and their manifestations in the present. In this way, the Nasa make their historical memory a useful tool for understanding and acting in the present. The framing of past stories is thus an example of what Rappaport calls *historical reinterpretation*, in which the past is fully experienced every day in the present (Rappaport 1990).

Studies on the Nasa focus more on political struggles with the State and less on the daily struggles for survival. Here, we show how framing processes play a role in the alternative strategies that emerge from indigenous day-to-day struggles. Studies using framing in conflict management have analysed the everyday interactions among opponents in a particular conflict (Aarts et al. 2011), and framing studies in social movements have examined the strategies deployed to convince people to join in and the collective action frames that serve to motivate collective action (Alte 2008; Donoso 2013). We have shown, however, that framing is not just a strategic and political tool for convincing people outside the group, and neither do framing processes represent only political opportunities for collective action. Our framing analysis has revealed deeper historical motivations behind people's actions and wishes – motivations that are essential for collective identity construction. In our case, the action of framing historical events goes beyond any conjuncture and helps the Nasa to make sense of their everyday activities and the changes that they need to make to reconstruct their identity and adopt non-violent strategies, depending on the specific context with which they are dealing. These framing processes represent a type of agency. As explained by Malksoo (2015), the core part of our identity is created from our inheritance, but moving forward, in terms of security, *would require the ability of political actors to learn to tell new stories about themselves* (Malksoo 2015, 231). In this sense, the reconstruction of historical memory plays a key role in Nasa survival strategies.

Constructing a collective identity by means of framing leads to mobilisation, unites people, and guides communities to action. In this way, the process of framing the past in terms of everyday interactions has become a major power resource for the Nasa in their dealings with threatening situations and events every day. This strategy plays a key role in Nasa survival as, in a highly dynamic and violent environment, making 'the right decisions' is not always easy for either individuals or indigenous organisations. Moreover, the framing process that we found for the GI history might change in the future when the Nasa are confronted with new challenges and changes.

Conclusions

Although not always consciously, but still actively and strategically, the Nasa constantly construct and reconstruct their collective identities by framing past stories.

These stories can appear paradoxical or even contradictory, but, as we have shown, they are complementary. The Nasa take some elements from the warrior, like bravery and courage, while rejecting others, such as the use of violence. In their stories, they exchange guns for human rights and indigenous rights in the Constitution, and they use symbols and rituals to protect themselves. Both the warrior and the non-violent guard represent the connection between past and present. The apparent contradiction of a non-violent warrior is eclipsed by the need for both continuity and adaptation to change. That said, these stories might not reflect the challenges entailed in adopting a non-violent identity, as it is not easy to deal with the feelings of anger, despair, hope, revenge, frustration, and disappointment associated with efforts to survive in violent and unjust environments. Thus, questions remain about the non-violent or the violent performance and practices of the indigenous guards.

Whereas non-violence was defined as a pragmatic strategy, we argue that the Nasa frame it as a principle. The GI identity construction can be pictured as a form of resistance that questions the political and social regime and points out the violent ways in which the State aims to resolve the issue of public order (Arendt 1999). Accordingly, the non-violent principle represents a challenge also for the State and supports a step forward to peacebuilding.

Our study shows that collective identity construction – based on historical memory – guides Nasa actions when they are dealing with conflicts in an innovative and non-violent way. Therefore, our study supports two conclusions: (1) history, as a tool of the present, confers power (Rappaport 1988) and (2) historical memory is a cultural resource that could work as a collective foundation for peacebuilding (Bender Shetler 2010). Equally, our findings illustrate the importance of everyday conversations and discourses when strategies are being created to mobilise historical memory for peacebuilding. It connects with notions of everyday peacebuilding, everyday diplomacy, and practices that can move society towards conflict transformation (Ginty 2014).

In relation to peacebuilding, one of the greatest challenges facing democratic societies is that of including claims of distinct group identities and cultural norms into a single State governed by a constitution that reflects and supports the identities and norms of all its citizens (Cott 2000). Framing identities from past events in conversations is a political practice. As Marisol de la Cadena (2010) has explained, indigenous politics claim a pluriversal politics, a new configuration that would connect different worlds with the possibility of becoming legitimate adversaries. Pluriversal politics adds a dimension of conflict but allows for conflicting views about that multiplicity to be discussed into argumentative forums (De La Cadena 2010). Therefore, the GI represents a strategy to resist violence, but also to resist the worldviews and lifestyles imposed by outsiders.

The GI could play a key role in the future of the Northern Cauca region. In a context of violent conflicts, the process of identification with different groups could make a difference between joining an armed group or not, using violence or not, in the struggle for justice and political inclusion. This is very relevant in a post-conflict setting, where new interactions will appear among groups that have decided to exchange a violent for a non-violent strategy of resistance.

NOTES

1. Personal interview, indigenous guard from Tacueyó *resguardo*, 21 March 2014.
2. Personal interview, an indigenous guard from Huellas-Caloto *resguardo*, 14 October 2014.
3. Personal interview, 29 January 2015.
4. Leader of Jámbalo *resguardo*, 2005 interview, in Centro de Memoria Histórica 2012.
5. Personal interview, 14 October 2014.
6. Personal interview, 28 November 2014.
7. Personal interview, 14 October 2014.
8. Personal interview, 13 January 2015.
9. Personal interview, 31 January 2015.
10. Personal interview, 31 January 2015.

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